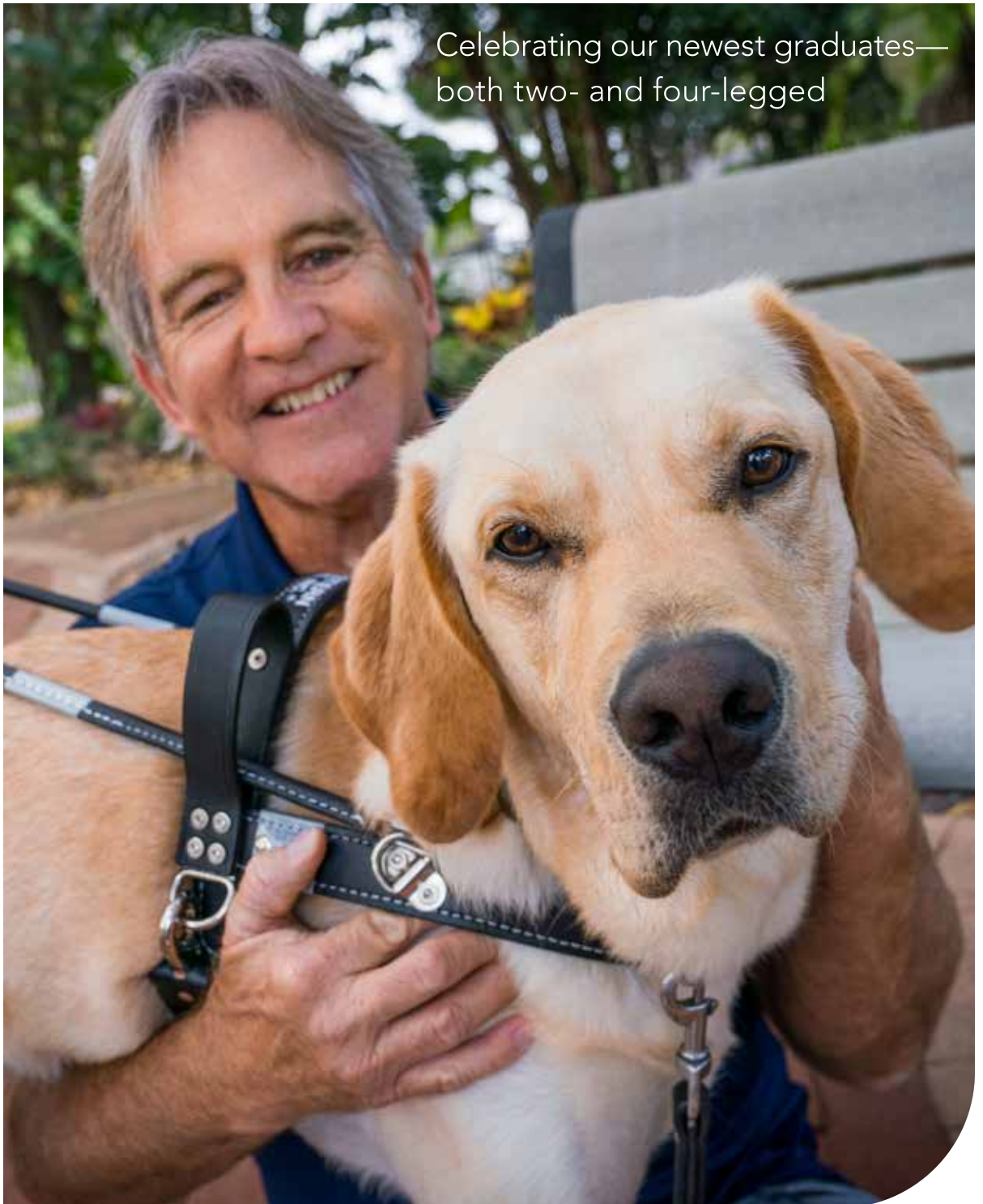


SIDE SIDE

 Southeastern
GUIDE DOGS

Celebrating our newest graduates—
both two- and four-legged

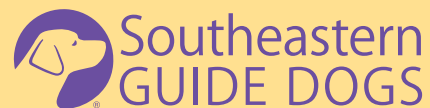


SPRING 2022

About

SIDE by SIDE is a publication of
Southeastern Guide Dogs

Southeastern Guide Dogs transforms lives by creating and nurturing extraordinary partnerships between people and dogs. We breed, raise, and train elite guide dogs, service dogs, and skilled companion dogs and provide life-changing services for people with vision loss, veterans with disabilities, and children with significant challenges. We offer our premier dogs and lifetime follow-up services at no cost. Since 1982, we have successfully created thousands of guide and service dog teams throughout the U.S. and currently oversee the well-being of over 1,200 puppies and dogs. **GuideDogs.org**.



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Side by Side.**



Welcome

Dear Friend,

Veteran Sean Brown spoke these words after meeting his second service dog, Nick:

"When Pella retired, my dreams and goals started to look bleak. But Nick has brought renewed vision and excitement that will lead to bigger goals and a much brighter future."



With every new graduate, we are inspired by the hope and spirit our dogs give to the people now walking by their sides. Whether the dog guides a person with vision loss, supports a veteran with PTSD or other disabilities, or comforts a child with significant challenges, these extraordinary dogs transform lives.

Here in this issue of *Side by Side*, we celebrate our most recent successful matches—the newest dynamic duos of Southeastern Guide Dogs.

With your support and friendship, our graduates have a chance to soar. We can't thank you enough for bringing their dreams to life.

Warm regards,

Titus Herman

Titus Herman
Chief Executive Officer

Our Programs

OUR DOGS

OFFER FREEDOM



For people with vision loss

Guide Dogs help people with vision loss navigate independently; trained in over 40 cues.

Kids Companion Dogs are skilled companion dogs that enhance independence for children with vision loss, preparing the way for a future guide dog.



For veterans

Service Dogs help veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other disabilities; trained in 15–20 cues.

Guide Dogs help veterans with vision loss navigate independently; trained in over 40 cues.

Facility Therapy Dogs provide comfort in military medical facilities nationwide.

Emotional Support Dogs benefit veterans and help restore a more active lifestyle.

Gold Star Family Dogs comfort military family members who have lost a loved one in active service to the nation.



For children & teens

Guide Dogs help teens with vision loss—ages 15 and up—navigate independently.

Kids Companion Dogs are skilled companion dogs that enhance independence for children with vision loss, preparing the way for a future guide dog.

Gold Star Family Dogs comfort military family members who have lost a loved one in active service to the nation.



Jennifer Syed Facility Therapy Dog Mata

132ND WING AIR NATIONAL GUARD 🇺🇸
DES MOINES, IA

As director of psychological health for the 132nd Wing Air National Guard, Jennifer Syed counsels hundreds of service members engaged in mentally, physically, and emotionally challenging work. Jennifer knew they needed a therapeutic outlet and believed a dog could help. Now a sweet, outgoing facility therapy dog named Mata brings joy, comfort, and relief. “If she could, she would crawl right inside of you because she wants to be that close,” says Jennifer. On tough days, staff feel much better after a dose of Mata’s morale-boosting therapy.

Mata was raised by Charles and Catherine Dunn.



Sarah Khan Guide Dog Otto

WINDERMERE, FLORIDA

Sarah Khan was born with a rare condition resulting in foggy vision and eyes unable to hydrate. Nevertheless, Sarah paints, creates digital art, and completed an online degree in computer science. Soon she plans to leave home and experience life on her own. As her next step to greater independence, she’s been paired with a carefree and gentle guide dog named Otto. “With Otto, I definitely plan to go out by myself and explore a lot,” she says. Otto is attentive, focused, and makes her feel liberated—he’s her perfect match!

Otto was raised by Sharon and Karl Whitehead.



“Conway is another soldier. He’s my buddy in combat because I live in combat right now with my PTSD.”

—Jorge Figueroa

Jorge Figueroa | Service Dog Conway

U.S. ARMY NATIONAL GUARD & RESERVE 🇺🇸
ST. CLOUD, FLORIDA

Conway was raised by Stephanie and Justin James.



Kennedy Brown | Guide Dog Clarke

CRESTVIEW, FLORIDA

Kennedy Brown is a cheerful, determined, and ambitious young woman who lives with the effects of Albinism. Her vision is limited by light sensitivity and night blindness, but her biggest challenge is poor depth perception. Everything appears far away, and it's easy for her to stumble. After graduating high school with a simultaneous associate of arts degree, Kennedy hoped to get a guide dog to help her as she completes a bachelor's degree in film. She now attends Full Sail University and works on creating her own photography business. She's been paired with Clarke, a sometimes goofy, sometimes chill, and always loving guide dog who fulfills all her wishes.

"I had an avoidance of walking by myself because of trip hazards and depth perception issues," Kennedy says. "So being that he shorelines very well, he keeps me very tight to the side." Shorelining means that a guide dog walks in a straight line alongside the curb or grass without wavering. Kennedy adds, "Living out in the country, he keeps me safe—on the right path and focused."

If Kennedy made a film about her caped sidekick, she would call it "Superman." Clarke will enable her to travel widely with confidence and safety. And just like Superman, Clarke will help everything work out fine in the end.


Clarke was raised by Hallie Worthington.



“When Pella retired, my dreams and goals started to look bleak, but Nick has brought renewed vision that will lead to a much brighter future!”

—Sean Brown

Sean Brown | Service Dog Nick

U.S. ARMY VETERAN 
PALMETTO, FLORIDA

Nick was raised by Eli Ross and Kerstin Ramus.

James | Kids Companion Dog Cherman

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

Five-year-old James lives with low vision and nystagmus—involuntary eye movements—caused by a glioma, or tumor that presses on his optic nerve. Despite a lifetime of chemotherapy and other treatments that began when he was only three months, this preschooler is a bright, funny, active, and inquisitive fellow who loves music and plays the violin.

With their doctor’s recommendation, a loving, four-legged Kids Companion Dog named Cherman has now joined the family. This easygoing dog will offer James extra support and show him what it’s like to care for a future guide dog. “Cherman is sweet and social and wants to sit with the kids all the time,” says James’ mother, Eva. They play fetch together, pray together, and have a special pillow hideout in a closet just for their private “reading club.”

James is a very active boy who tries hard to keep up with his older sister, brother, and two pet dogs. They hike and travel for adventures, and with Cherman by his side, James is learning to navigate all kinds of terrain. “Cherman has been a very bright spot for us,” Eva adds. “He’s just a precious addition to our family. I feel like he’s a special dog, and I feel very grateful that we have him.”



Cherman was raised by Jeanne and Bob Heere.



Desiree Carrion Guide Dog Rebel

PORT ST. LUCIE, FLORIDA

Retinitis pigmentosa began robbing Desiree Carrion's vision at birth. About five years ago, she struggled seeing faces and thought her frequent falls were because she was clumsy. Now her guide dog changes everything. "He's helping me to be more mobile," Desiree says. "He's the perfect match."

Rebel was raised by Roy and Debbie Kennedy.



"Opal's a gem. There's been a couple of times she's woken up from a dead sleep and immediately went into a hug position."

—Tom | Service Dog Opal
U.S. NAVY VETERAN 

Opal was raised by Linda Pyper.



Luke Kids Companion Dog Eli

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

Five-year-old Luke was born blind due to a virus, while his twin sister, Olivia, was healthy. To help him overcome fears and gain independence, Luke received Eli, a Kids Companion Dog. His mom says, "Eli's a gentle giant who loves Luke and gives him confidence."

Luke was raised by Laura and Troy Ledbetter.

"Jeane adds the social bridge that I often lacked. This has been the most amazing experience and I'm very, very grateful."

—Chelsey Darrow



Chelsey Darrow | Service Dog Jeane

U.S. ARMY VETERAN 
VICTOR, MONTANA

Jeane was raised by Richard Kelller.



J.D. | Service Dog Griff

U.S. MARINE CORPS VETERAN 🇺🇸
PINEVILLE, KENTUCKY

Marine veteran J.D. served in Iraq where he worked in computer technology and secure defense messaging systems. He spent years on the fence about getting a service dog for his post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms because it seemed like too much responsibility. But when his two small sons got older, the time finally felt right.

J.D. liked everything he saw and heard about Southeastern Guide Dogs, so he applied. Now he has been paired with a smart and handsome dog named Griff, and he is no longer doubting himself. “It’s been a great experience,” J.D. says. “I’m so glad that I was able to do the research and find this place.”

Griff and J.D. both like to work hard and then relax. With Griff’s help, J.D. looks forward to reducing his self-isolation and anxiety and living a better life. Having a dog to focus on, walk, feed, and care for is a perfect distraction when J.D. gets stuck in what he calls an “anxiety loop.” After the Marines, he was a VA mental health counselor, but the job was too stressful. Now he works as a high school counselor and can’t wait to introduce his new buddy. He explains, “I look forward to going places, taking him to work, and having that comfort knowing that someone’s there to help me through it all.”

Griff was raised by Taunnie and Charlie Novak.



Bill Adkins | Samson Emotional Support Dog

U.S. MARINE CORPS VETERAN 
SUN CITY CENTER, FLORIDA

Marine veteran Bill Adkins saw 13 months of combat in Vietnam. When Parkinson's disease affected his mobility and mental health, Bill received a lovable emotional support dog, Samson. "I feel blessed to have this wonderful creature to keep me company," he says. "He makes me happy."

Samson was raised by Shelbie Broach.



"With Dakota, it's so freeing, and it does make it easier for me just to go and live my life."

—Kelsey Pepler | Service Dog Dakota

U.S. ARMY NATIONAL GUARD VETERAN 
WEST WARWICK, RHODE ISLAND

Dakota was raised by Sandy Schoen.



Camden Kids Companion Dog Zinger

MIDDLETOWN, DELAWARE

Camden, 3, lost his vision from a benign brain tumor. Now a sweet and well-trained Kids Companion Dog named Zinger helps Camden explore his world, without him being confined to a stroller. "We look forward to this journey together with Southeastern Guide Dogs," says his dad.

Zinger was raised by Vicky and Joe Cox and Kathy and Dennis Spence.



Jim Kidd | Guide Dog Toby

FORT MYERS, FLORIDA

Jim Kidd started seeing an eye specialist at the age of 43 and was surprised to learn that all his life he had adapted to impaired visual fields in both eyes. The cause was a mystery. Eleven years later, in 2014, he was diagnosed with glaucoma. In 2016, he voluntarily stopped driving and retired from 32 years as a delivery truck driver. For the past six years, Jim has relied on his wife, Lorie, to "run blocker" for him while he stumbled and felt clumsy. He needed more than a white cane to get around.

Enter Toby, the guide dog who has exceeded Jim's expectations. "Sometimes I just can't find the words because of Toby's level of intelligence, his level of focus, and the fact that he can distinguish between when I'm in control and when he's on a leash, and when he's in harness and he's working and he's guiding me. I mean, it's nothing short of phenomenal. It's just amazing," Jim declares.

Toby is energetic and eager to please. "A tremendous abundance of unconditional love pours out from those beautiful, dark eyes and his gestures," Jim adds. With his solid and true four-legged companion by his side, life feels more safe and secure, and Jim now enjoys a great sense of relief, satisfaction, and confidence.

Toby was raised by Victoria Mertin.

"A tremendous abundance of unconditional love pours out from those beautiful, dark eyes and his gestures."

Geoffrey Mandell | Service Dog Noel

U.S. AIR FORCE VETERAN 🇺🇸

BOCA RATON, FLORIDA

Air Force veteran Geoffrey Mandell served as an aircraft technician, maintaining electrical and environmental systems of C-130 aircraft. During seven months in Afghanistan, he worked as a flight engineer on missions that dropped supplies in dangerous places and transported the badly injured back to base. It was intense, and when he left the military in 2014, Geoffrey bore emotional scars and physical injuries that required multiple surgeries.

He went back to school for aerospace engineering and briefly became a SpaceX launch engineer, until he required more spinal surgery. Despite living with post-traumatic stress disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder, however, this vet wasn't convinced he deserved a

service dog. Then he began to follow social media posts of Lone Survivor Marcus Luttrell and his dog, Mr. Rigby, as well as veterans' stories on our website. Finally, Geoffrey decided to apply for a dog of his own.

Now, he's been matched with a sweet, intelligent girl named Noel who will help him overcome his anxieties. Geoffrey jokes that he won't be able to compulsively wash his hands while petting her, and he'll have to get used to having fur and slobber invade his pristine environment. Most importantly, Noel will get him back outside to play and be active again. Geoffrey says, "Every day with her gets better, and I'm excited to see what comes next!"

Noel was raised by Donnie and Allen Lancaster.



"I couldn't have gone to the store without a person with me. Now I can do that because I have Luke. He's so good!"

—Veronica Davila



Veronica Davila | Service Dog Luke

U.S. ARMY VETERAN 🇺🇸

NEW PORT RICHEY, FLORIDA

Luke was raised by Lynn and Frank Aquilon.



Beatriz | Guide Dog Darius

ESTERO, FLORIDA

Beatriz entered the world with glaucoma in her right eye, although her identical twin sister was completely healthy. Being adopted in Argentina, the siblings know little about their medical history. Beatriz had several surgeries as an infant, including at the National Institutes of Health in Washington, D.C. and an eye clinic in Barcelona. Then, a hemorrhage in her left eye meant it had to be replaced by a prosthesis. Gradually, nystagmus and corneal edema further complicated her vision.


After more surgeries as well as moves to Brazil and Florida, life settled down for Beatriz. However, when her vision began to get cloudier, she found herself unable to walk safely alone, especially crossing streets. She limited her activities and gave up her job at a children's learning center. Beatriz's boyfriend became her lifeline.

Research brought Beatriz to Southeastern Guide Dogs, where she received a perfect match with guide dog Darius, a cool, curious Lab who enjoys relaxing as well as working. "Every time I get her up to do something, she's always happy and excited," her handler says. Darius' calmness helps Beatriz relax, too, and she no longer stresses about taking care of her very first dog. With a new sense of independence, exploring the world is made possible again. Beatriz says, "I feel that now I have the confidence, and I'm willing to do it."

Darius was raised by Jennifer, Lydia, and Leah Mortensen.



Robert Williams Service Dog Copper


U.S. AIR FORCE VETERAN 
PARRISH, FLORIDA

Former Air Force intelligence officer Robert Williams supported troops through information, management, and targeting. He then served as a defense contractor, retiring in 2020. Post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, and neurological disorders have affected his health. Now Robert has been matched with a bright and friendly buddy, service dog Copper, who helps him by retrieving items so he doesn't have to bend over, which can cause fainting. "Copper is loving and patient with me," he says. "That close companionship can help you thrive and heal."

Copper was raised by Crystal and David Bailey.



Patrick Insignares Service Dog Charlie

U.S. AIR FORCE VETERAN 
WIMAUMA, FLORIDA

Patrick Insignares spent 23 years in the Air Force, traveling on many assignments. While at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey, he encountered a young man's gruesome death by suicide. Patrick buried that traumatic image for 16 years, but when his best friend was killed by a drunk driver, the shock triggered repressed memories. After seeking therapy, he sought help from a service dog. Now with Charlie, this veteran feels more grounded, confident, and expressive. Patrick says, "So far, he's been able to look into my eyes and calm me down."

Charlie was raised by Maria and Ed Cerbone.



**"She makes
people feel
safe; her
companionship
gives our
members an
experience that
feels like home."**

—Jimm Harper

Jimm Harper Facility Therapy Dog Dallas

U.S. ARMY AND AIR FORCE
RESERVES VETERAN 
NAVAL AIR STATION FORT WORTH
JOINT RESERVE BASE, TEXAS

*Dallas was raised by Linda and Tom Wilson
and Judy McKerlie*



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- Founder** | \$100,000+ per year

Leave a Legacy That Lasts



HERITAGE SOCIETY

The Heritage Society is a group of caring individuals committed to ensuring the long-term stability of our school through wills and bequests. To join, simply notify us that you have included Southeastern Guide Dogs in your will by **emailing heritagesociety@guidedogs.org**, and find out more at **[GuideDogs.org/HS](#)**.

Remembering Southeastern Guide Dogs in your will creates a legacy of kindness, and gifts of any size impact our extraordinary dogs. Don't have a will? We've partnered with Freewill.com to give you a simple, convenient way to write a legally valid will, at no cost. Get started on your will today by visiting **[GuideDogs.org/will](#)**.

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